

NURSERIES FOR HEAVEN.



IN the north of Ireland stands an old family mansion, the proprietor of which is well known for his generous deeds. Early one summer morning, in the year 1836, I passed that way, and called, and was received with true Irish hospitality. After breakfast, my host said, "Now, Mr. —, I will give you some work: follow me." I arose and followed, and soon found myself in a large room, in which were gardeners, masons, carpenters, painters, etc., to the number of about 120; who were all employed in enlarging the house and improving the gardens. They had been collected at the sound of the bell for morning prayers. I read and prayed, and gave them a word of counsel and encouragement. The whole time of service was one quarter of an hour. Of course, the men were in their working dress, and a most interesting sight it was; for I saw many of them using their shirt sleeves, instead of pocket handkerchiefs, to wipe away their tears.

After we retired, I asked my friend if that was his practice every day: "Yes," said he, "every day; and everything goes on the better for it. We have been engaged in these buildings upwards of a year, and we have never missed one morning. Either myself, or our curate, or some other minister, has officiated." "And what are the advantages

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connected with it?" I inquired. "O," said he, "there are many, but the following are very evident. In the first place, some of the men have become religious. Two of the poor fellows lately died, who gave us every satisfaction we could wish that they were prepared for heaven. We often visited them in their affliction, and heard them bless God that they ever came to work at 'the hall;' for their minds were first impressed at the morning service." I said, "This is a rich reward for the time thus spent." "Yes," he replied, "it is a rich reward; but even apart from this, I am no loser, nor will any man be who is seeking to improve the temporal and spiritual condition of his people, for it promotes sobriety, by which they save more for their families; it makes them more careful of their time; and, besides, they always seem happy, for they consider me as their friend as well as their employer."

I expressed my hope that he would keep building at the same rate for seven years to come; for by it his house became a large "nursery for heaven."

The following summer I visited the south of England, and took up my abode for a night in the house of a pious manufacturer. A little before ten the next morning, he said to me, "Would you like to see 'the works?'" "Yes." So we walked down, and as soon as we entered, a signal was given, and men, women, and children hastened into "the long room." Some sat, others stood, and when they were all assembled, a Bible was presented to me, with a request that I would perform Divine service, to which I consented. The strange and unexpected scene for a moment overcame me, and I was much affected. In conversing about it afterwards with the proprietor, I said, "You took me quite by surprise, sir." "Yes," said he, "I intended to do so. It is not usual for such services to be held in factories, and I was almost driven to it from necessity." "Indeed," said I, "how could that be?" "I will tell you. I had some very clever workmen who were much addicted to drunkenness, and other vices which usually accompany drunkenness. They were a great curse to the factory, as they were not only destroying themselves, but poisoning others. It grieved me a good deal, and I adopted various plans to reform them; but all in vain. It is true I could have discharged them; but I did not like to do that, on account of their families. At last I thought, I will try

another plan: so I determined on that you have seen this morning, and God has blessed it. The men are reformed, and I have peace, and if my experience goes for anything, I would recommend the plan to every manufacturer in the world."

Now I wish to see what this gentleman has tried, and found to be so beneficial, universally adopted; and were this done, I have no doubt but it would quickly convert many a manufactory into a "nursery for heaven."

It has been hinted to me, that in some quarters an unhappy feeling exists between the masters and the men, in which case the plan would not be cordially received, if the masters proposed it; but it need not be abandoned on that account, as the following fact may show.

At Maidenhead, in Berkshire, I preached two sermons in behalf of the instruction of the liberated negroes in the West Indies. This was on the sabbath. The next morning at six I preached again, when a labouring man, dressed in a wagoner's frock, came to me and said, "I should like to speak to you alone, sir." "Well, friend, what do you wish?" "I wonder if I understood you yesterday: did you say that missionaries were wanted to instruct the blacks?" "Yes." "Then it is true?" "Yes." "Well, sir, I have been thinking a good deal about it to-night. The Lord Jesus Christ has been a blessed Master to me, and he has great claims upon me. He has made me happy, sir. He has pardoned my sins: he has saved my soul." "I rejoice," said I, "to hear you say so: then Christ has claims upon you, indeed. I hope you love him." "Love him!" he exclaimed, "Love him, sir! Yes; and I could tell the poor heathen much about him." I said, "Can you read?" "No, sir," he replied, "I cannot read. There was no school in my native village, when I was young; now there are schools everywhere, and every poor child may learn to read. It was not so when I was a boy; but though I cannot read, yet I could tell them a good deal about him." "What is your occupation, friend? Do you work in the fields?" Yes, sir, I was working in the fields this morning, but I could not stop any longer: I thought I would come and hear a bit more about it." "And I am glad you came," said I, "that I might hear this precious testimony from your lips. And now I will tell you how to turn it to good account. You are too old to go as a missionary, even if

you were qualified ; but you may be useful at home. When you have some people working with you in the fields, tell them what you have told me ; say to them, ‘ The Lord Jesus Christ has been a blessed Master to me. He has made me happy : he has pardoned my sins : he has saved my soul : ’ and say, he is able to do the same for them, and he is willing too ; and urge them without delay to seek his mercy ; then you will be ‘ a field missionary.’ ” At this the springs in his head broke loose, and a flood of tears gushed from his eyes, and he caught hold of my right hand with both of his, and said, “ Thank you, sir, thank you ; I will. Ay ; I’ll go, and be ‘ a field missionary : ’ ” and he went.

Now, how many godly men are there among the operatives who can read and write, and speak also, who could do in the factories what this good man was going to do in the fields, that is, become “ factory missionaries.” O, think about it. Pray over it. Resolve on it, and practise it. Then God would open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing.

When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, every man did a little towards it. He who had a house, repaired before his own house ; and he who had only a chamber, built before his window. Many hands soon accomplish a great work ; and if every one who loves God would act a faithful part towards his neighbour, we should soon see great good done.

Respected countrymen ! You wish to be happy ; yet fifty acts of parliament would not produce the happiness you want : no ; but more religion would do it : more in the masters, and more in the men. For if there were more religion, there would be more love : and if there were more love, there would be a mutual fulfilling of that holy commandment, “ Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do ye to them, for this is the law and the prophets.”

Oh may the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to save sinners, constrain our hearts to love him, and to love one another ! Then whatever our situation in life, we shall try to guide others to heaven.

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